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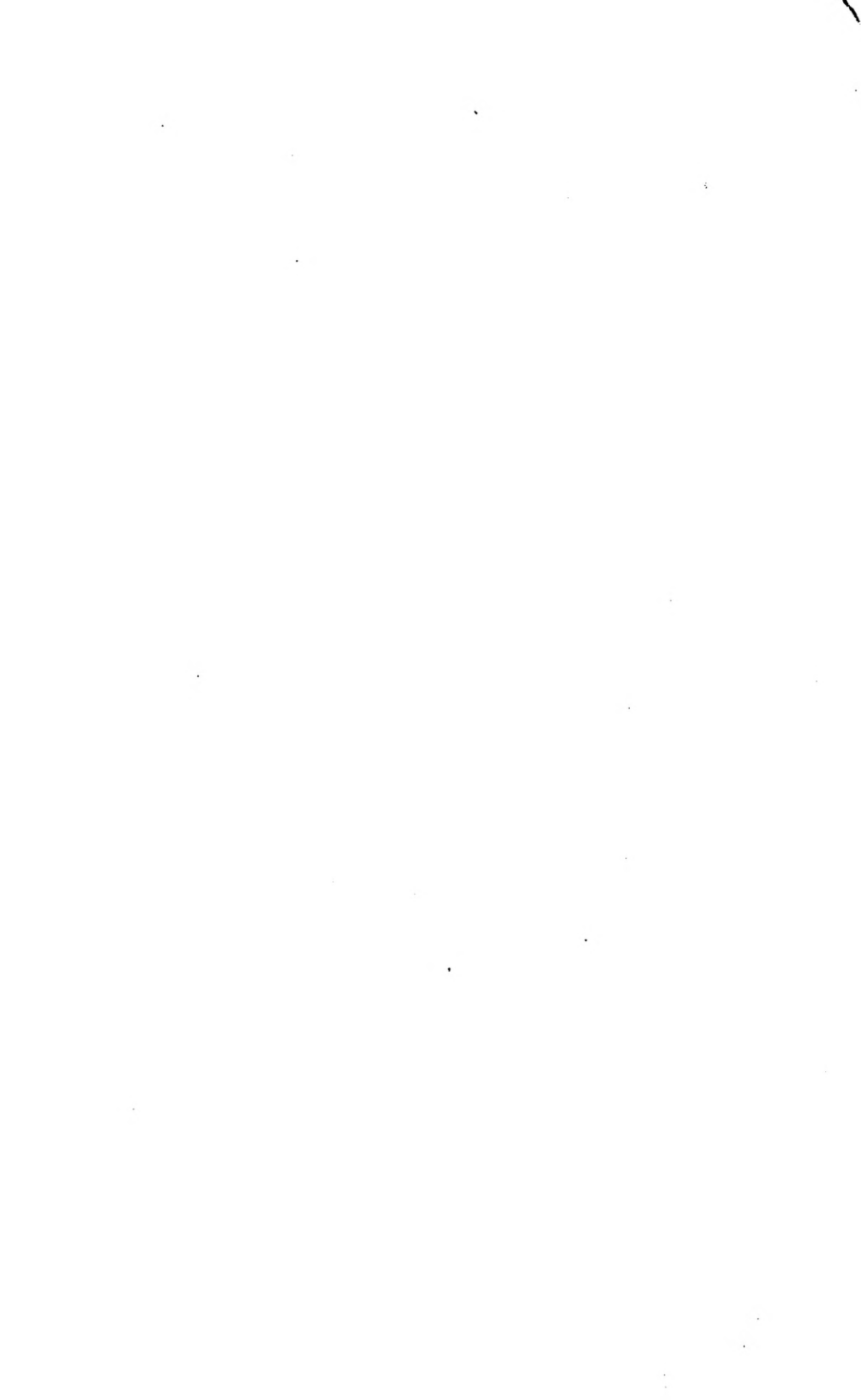
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✦ SKETCH ✦

— OF THE —

BATTLE OF WINCHESTER,

SEPT. 19, 1864.



SKETCH

— OF THE —

BATTLE OF WINCHESTER,

SEPTEMBER 19, 1864.

A PAPER

— READ BEFORE —

THE OHIO COMMANDERY

— OF THE —

LOYAL LEGION OF THE UNITED STATES,

BY COMPANION

FIRST LIEUTENANT M. L. HAWKINS,

MARCH 5, 1884.

CINCINNATI
PETER G. THOMSON.
1884.

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IN EXCHANGE

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Sketch of the Battle of Winchester.

This engagement, styled by Gen. Sheridan, our commander, as the battle of Opequan, to distinguish it from previous contests around Winchester, restored the lower Valley of Virginia to Union control, from which it was never again wrested: it permanently relieved Maryland and Pennsylvania from the periodical invasions to which they had been subjected during three years, and the national capitol from further humiliations. This result had been accomplished by a battle, which, taken with its sequences inflicted upon the Confederate forces, losses in troops nearly as great as those which were sustained by the Union arms—an experience fatal to the fast dwindling forces of the South.

The moral effect of this victory on the North was most wholesome. The discouragement which had prevailed regarding operations in the Shenandoah Valley since the year 1861 wholly disappeared. The magnetism Sheridan exercised upon his troops spread through the country, and henceforth caused his fortunes in the valley to be watched with the eager expectation and hearty good will which fall to the lot of the favorite soldier.

What old soldier here but remembers, with pride, the part he took in the many battles, skirmishes, marches and bivouacs, in that historic valley of Virginia? Beautiful to look upon, and so fertile, that it was styled the granary of Virginia; rich in its well-filled barns, its cattle, its busy mills, the Shenandoah Valley furnished from its abundant crops much of the subsistence of the Rebel army. When Confederate forces

occupied it, their horses fattened on its forage, and in quitting it to invade the North, the commissaries filled their wagons from its storehouses and farms.

Looking at the Shenandoah Valley in history, we see that it was the scene of constant Confederate maneuvering, whether on a large scale, under "Stonewall" Jackson, Ewell and Early, or on a smaller one under Ashby, Mosby, Imboden and Gilmer.

From the first, it was a tempting field for the strategists of both armies. The initial campaign of the war turned on the use made of the Valley by the forces which Gen. J. E. Johnston posted at its outlet, under the name of the "Army of the Shenandoah."

There, too, Jackson began the campaign of 1862, by sustaining a check from Shields, for which he fully indemnified himself when, a few months later, he fell upon Shields at Port Republic, defeated Fremont at Cross Keys, captured the garrison at Front Royal, drove Banks across the Potomac, and by alarming Washington, broke up the impending junction of McDowell and McClellan and the threatened capture of Richmond. It was from the Valley that Jackson, repeating on a bolder circuit the Manassas device of 1861, hurried to turn the Union right on the Peninsula. Lee found in the Valley a line of communications for his Maryland campaign, and captured at Harper's Ferry 11,000 men, seventy-three guns, and 13,000 small arms; there, too, he sought rest and refreshment on retreating from the Antietam. The Valley was Lee's route of invasion after defeating Hooker at Chancellorsville; Ewell, on entering at Chester Gap, took several thousand men and a score or more of guns from Milroy, and thither again Lee fell back after Gettysburg, pitching his camps along the Opequan, a creek which gives the name to the battle we commemorate to-day. The Valley of Virginia had always played an important part in the drama of the war. It had yielded so many captures of Union garrisons, and so many disasters in the field as to be called the Valley

of Humiliation, and not until it was wrested from Confederate control did the problem of the Richmond campaign find a successful solution.

It would be impossible, comrades, in the time allotted me for this sketch, to tell of the fights, the skirmishes, the battles, the marches, the countermarches, and the movements immediately preceding the Battle of Winchester. Some of you remember the hot times at Halltown, at Kenrstown, at Carter's Farm, at Martinsburg, at Summit Point, and the fighting at every turn while in the lower valley. We must come at once to the memorable day, over nineteen years ago, when you and I saw again our comrades falling by the wayside in scores. In the main, little Phil. Sheridan and his veteran army had won the laurels, and now, on the eve of the battle, the air seemed laden with omens of victory. With Early weakened by the withdrawal of Kershaw and his division, bad doubts prevailed as to the result of a pitched battle. Early would have removed them by choosing this moment, by giving freer rein than ever to his main error in the campaign, that is the weakening of his forces in order to strengthen Lee at Petersburg. Had Early not woefully mistaken Sheridan's character, he would at once, on losing Kershaw, have so repositioned his forces as to be able to retire up the valley to Strasburg the moment his adversary should give sign of attack.

Sheridan's plan was to move his infantry, preceded by a division of cavalry, along the Berryville pike against Winchester, and the other two divisions of horse to Stephenson's depot. Torbert was to advance across the Opequan from Summit Point, with Merritt's division, and to form a junction near Stephenson's with Averill, who was to move up the pike from Darksville. Nelson was to march rapidly along the Berryville pike, carry the crossing of the Opequan, and charge through the long ravine beyond, toward Winchester. The sixth and nineteenth corps, the former in advance, and Emery responding to Wright on reaching the Opequan, were to move along the Berryville pike as thus cleared by Wilson.

The army of West Virginia, or the eighth corps, Gen. Geo. Crook commanding, of which our own old Thirty-fourth Ohio formed a part, was to march across the country from Summit Point taking position in reserve at the crossing of the Opequan.

The scene of the battle now to be fought demands a brief description. Opequan Creek, rising half a dozen miles south of Winchester, pursues its course down the valley four or five miles to the east of that city, and continuing in its general direction parallel to the pike, joins the Potomac below Falling Waters. The turnpike, from Berryville to Winchester, after crossing the Opequan, passes through a wooded ravine. Running nearly due east into the Opequan, and crossing the valley pike about a mile from Winchester, is Abraham's Creek; while a nearly parallel little affluent, about a mile and a half north of Winchester, is Red Bud Run, the Berryville pike being between them. The distance from Berryville to Winchester is ten and a half miles, the crossing of the Opequan on the pike being about six from the former point. The region in the suburbs of Winchester was undulating, covered here and there with patches of woods, but generally high and open, with meadows, corn-fields and some houses. Abraham's Creek runs through a deep hollow, but there is high, open ground beyond, on the Front Royal and Millwood Roads, while to the north the country slopes to the Red Bud, which is lower and more marshy. North of the Red Bud the country is open, and excellent for cavalry.

Early's position, prior to his movement of two corps to Martinsburg, was this: Ramseur, with Nelson's artillery, a mile east of Winchester, across the Berryville pike, along an elevated plateau between Abraham's Creek and Red Bud Run: Rhodes, Gordon, Wharton, with Braxton's and King's batteries, were at Stephenson's; one division of cavalry picketing the Opequan, extending its outpost line northward, and then crossing the Martinsburg pike westward toward the mountains, to cover the left; the other division picketing the right along the Millwood and Front Royal roads to the Shenandoah.

The morning of September 19, 1864, broke auspiciously. Sheridan's army was astir by one or two o'clock, and marching by three, in order to reach the enemy betimes. Nelson galloping through the Berryville gorge, which is two or three miles long, McIntosh's brigade in advance, at dawn carried the earth-work at the mouth of the defile, capturing some of its garrison. The infantry followed in the path thus cleared. The sixth corps, Getty's division leading, crossed the country to a point on the Berryville pike about two miles from the Opequan. There the head of the nineteenth corps was found, ready to turn in, and was halted by Wright, to whom Emery had reported, until the sixth should pass. The troops marched on either side of the pike, the artillery, ambulances, and such of the train as was carried, taking the macadamized road. There the column crossed the Opequan near the junction of Abraham's Creek, and moved through the ravine. Debouching there, it found Wilson still in his captured earth-work unmolested. Just beyond this work, rolling ground offered sufficient protection for deploying the column; and the troops that had been halted in the ravine, being gradually drawn up on the line, the first stage of the enterprise was successfully accomplished.

The position now taken up was two miles from Winchester, but as the enemy was more than a mile in front of the city, the sixth corps went into line under a heavy artillery fire, to which the Union guns soon replied. The third division, Rickett's, was on the right of the pike, the second, Getty's, on the left: the first, Russell's, in reserve. Four batteries, as they came up, were placed on the corps' front, under charge of Col. C. H. Tompkins, chief of artillery. The formation was designed to be in two lines, but the second division was mostly placed in one line, in order to cover its ground. Wilson took position on the left of the sixth corps.

The nineteenth corps had been halted to allow the sixth to pass, and was further impeded by the guns and wagons of this corps; but Wright, at Emery's request, at length ordered

these, except one battery, to the side of the road, so that the nineteenth might have a better chance. Still, it was about noon before the line was ready to move forward, the second division, Grover's, of the nineteenth, having come in upon the right of the sixth, the first, Dwight's, being held as a reserve in the rear, and the last of the sixth corps batteries having arrived.

During the morning hours, Ramseur's division had been the only infantry immediately confronting Sheridan at Winchester, aided by Nelson's battery. Jackson's, and a part of Johnston's cavalry, under Lomax, watched the valley of Abraham's Creek and the Front Royal road, on Ramseur's right, and a detachment of Johnston the space between his left and the Red Bud. But while the Union line was forming in front of Ramseur, Gordon and Rhodes were hurried from Stephen's, and the former arriving first, between ten and eleven o'clock, was placed in the timber on Ramseur's left near the Red Bud, Johnston's cavalry detachment having been moved to the right for this purpose, while Rhodes, when he came up, was positioned between Gordon and Ramseur. Had the Union march through the ravine been as rapid as was hoped, Ramseur might have been overwhelmed before aid could arrive. The change in the situation was that Sheridan had now, unexpectedly, to fight Early's whole army.

At twenty minutes before mid-day, the line moved across the open to the belt of woods opposite, where the flashes of the enemy's cannon had told of his presence. No sooner had the infantry gone forward, than the battle at once became deadly, and so continued through the day, being fought without field-works.

On the left, south of Abraham's Creek, near Greenwood church and school-house, Nelson moved along the Senceny road, which runs parallel to the Berryville pike, more than a mile distant from it: here holding Lomax in check, and very soon forcing him back. The sixth corps pressing forward on both sides of the Berryville pike, through an almost open

country, drove back Ramseur and Rhodes. The nineteenth corps sharply attacked Gordon. Grover in advance, was formed with his first and third brigades, Birge and Sharpe, in the front line, and the fourth and second, Shunk and Molineux, in the second. The effort to keep connection with the left of the line made a gap which was filled by bringing Molineux into the front line between Birge and Sharpe. Grover now assailed the enemy's left with great effect. "Evan's brigade of Gordon's division," says Early, "which was on the extreme left of our infantry, received a check from a column of the enemy, and was forced back through the woods from behind which it had advanced, the enemy following to the very rear of the woods, and to within musket range of seven pieces of Braxton's artillery, which were without support. This caused a pause in our advance, and the position was most critical, for it was apparent that unless this force was driven back the day was lost. Braxton's guns, in which now was our only hope, resolutely stood their ground."

The success thus gained against the Georgia brigade, which was driven into the woods, broke up the continuity of the Union line. Even before this, Col. Keifer, commanding the right brigade of Rickett's, which formed the right of the sixth corps, had noticed that the turnpike, on which the division was dressing, bore to the left, causing an interval between it and the nineteenth corps, and he had pushed three regiments into this space. Braxton's guns, concentrating against the triumphant Union assailants, soon had a visible effect in checking their advance: and at this moment Battle's brigade of Rhodes' division, which had just arrived from Stephenson's, and had formed in the rear of Evans, came through the woods on a charge—fresh troops at a critical hour. They struck the thinly-covered junction of the right of the sixth and the left of the nineteenth corps, and quickly supported on their flanks by the remainder of Rhodes and all of Gordon, the broken brigade rallying with the rest, they succeeded in driving back Rickett's division of the sixth corps, and Grover of

the nineteenth, while the whole line, to some extent, felt the effect, and came backward somewhat toward the position in front of the ravine from which it had advanced. This temporary advantage which caused the chief loss of prisoners suffered by the Union forces, cost Early the life of Gen. Rhodes, one of his most skillful division commanders.

At this juncture, Russell's division of the sixth corps splendidly improved a golden opportunity. Ordered at once to move up into the front line, now needing reinforcements, this change brought it into the gap created by the Confederate charge, and continuing its advance, it struck the flank of the hostile force which was sweeping away the Union right, and aided by the fifth Maine battery, which enfiladed the enemy's line with canister, at once turned the tide. The enemy retreated, the line was re-established, the fugitives were gathered from the woods in which they had taken refuge, while the gallant division took position on the right of its corps. But in the hour of his triumph, Russell had fallen, a piece of shell had passed through his heart. He had just before received a bullet wound in his left breast, but had not mentioned this to any of his staff, continuing to urge forward his troops. "His death," said Sheridan, "brought sadness to every heart in the army." The broken portion of Rickett's line was quickly reformed behind the first division, now under Upton, and again moved forward, while Dwight's division having taken the place of Grover's on the right of the line, the latter was promptly rallied and brought up.

It was now past mid-day, and after the fierce and continuous struggle which had included Sheridan's initial advance, his recoil under the charge from the Confederate left, and his rally and re-advance toward Early's position in the woods, there was a comparative lull, which the Union commander employed in preparing for an effort with his full strength. The army of West Virginia, with our beloved Crook at its head, which had been left in reserve, was now moving on the scene. Sheridan's original purpose had been

to use it on the left for seizing the valley pike when he had supposed that he would have but half the enemy's force to meet at Winchester, and that it would attempt escape to Strasburg; but the temporary repulse of the Union right, and the strength developed by the enemy there, made it evident that whatever danger was to be apprehended would come from that flank; this, indeed, was probable from the outset, since the absent Confederate divisions, hurrying in from Stephenson's and beyond to Ramseur's relief, or driven in by the cavalry there, must necessarily fall upon the Union right.

Leaving a small portion of the corps to guard her trains, Crook was ordered to move the rest rapidly on the front on the pike. Thoburn marching forward with the first and third brigades of his division, found the ravine filled with wagons, artillery, ambulances and stragglers, seriously impeding his progress and that of Duval, commanding the second division. Thoburn, under Crook's direction, formed in two lines, Wells the first and Harris the second, on the right of the pike, behind the heavy wood, in front of which Emery was fighting, and then moved forward to Emery's right, connecting closely with it and compactly filling the space to the swampy hollow drained by Red Bud Run. Duval went on the north side of the run, holding Crook's right.

Sheridan arrived about this time, and directed Thoburn, as soon as Duval was up and connecting with him, to charge directly through the woods in his front. A rousing cheer announced Duval's approach, and both he and Thoburn rushed at the woods with a confident eagerness that broke Gordon's division which was at this point.

But this was not the only fresh force that now threatened the Confederate left. Torbert, setting out early in the morning, with Merritt's division, had crossed the Opequan at Ridgeway's and Locke's fords, while Averill had come up the Martinsburg pike. Merritt dispersed the enemy's pickets, but a mile and a half beyond found himself checked by Wharton's division of infantry and King's battery, which were at Steph-

enson's, and had advanced to meet him. The incident was vexatious, but Averill, driving the enemy in his own front, comprising Imboden's cavalry, now under Smith, and McCausland's, now under Ferguson, all the way up the pike from Darksville to Stephenson's, thus came into the rear of the infantry, facing Merritt, which thereupon abandoned its position. Only with difficulty and some hard fighting did Breckenridge succeed in bringing off Wharton on the pike from Stephenson's, arriving at Winchester about 2 o'clock A. M. Patton's brigade was left to help Fitz Lee's cavalry to withstand Torbert: but before long the latter was driving in both Patton and Fitz Lee, "the cavalry," says Early, "coming back in great confusion, followed by the enemy's." To add to the stress, Wilson, far on the left, had so threatened the Millwood and Valley pikes, that Early was compelled to weaken Fitz Lee, even in his need, by detaching Wickham's brigade, so as to secure a route for a retreat, which was all he could now hope for. He had also, at first, moved two of Wharton's three brigades toward his right, where he feared being cut off; but almost immediately these were sent back, for, by 4 o'clock, Crook and Torbert were simultaneously attacking Early's left flank—Averill on the west of the Martinsburg pike, Merritt on the east, and Crook on Merritt's left.

Crook, on entering the fight along Red Bud Run, had struck Patton's infantry brigade and Payne's cavalry, which had been trying to hold back Torbert from coming in on the rear of Early's left flank. Breckenridge was accordingly now employing the other two brigades of Wharton and King's battery in checking Torbert. As Breckenridge's line was necessarily at right angles with the Martinsburg pike, its flank was in turn exposed to Crook, who was advancing between Wharton and Gordon. The latter, therefore, put in Evans' brigade to fill this gap, and Thoburn soon received a flank fire. He saw he must change front to the left, "but the instincts of the soldier," he says with a fine frankness, "prompted to the proper movement: before my commands

could be conveyed, each man was marching and facing toward the enemy's fire. Colonel Duval's division crossed Red Bud Run morass at this point, and his command and my own mingled together and acted together until the pursuit was over; 'tis true, our lines were broken and all gone, but had we moved in such a manner as to preserve our lines, the enemy would have escaped unhurt, or else driven us back."

While Crook and Torbert were coming in on the right, the sixth and nineteenth corps had been advanced with equal success on their fronts, driving Ramseur and Rhodes steadily back to Winchester. For "as soon as the firing was heard in rear of our left flank," says Early, "the infantry began falling back along the whole line." A mile of such progress on both flanks brought the Union troops close to the town, where a line of breastworks, constructed early in the war, gave the shattered Confederate forces some refuge, and batteries were planted there, and also at the toll-gate and cemetery. Wickham, hurrying back to Early's left, now took position on Fort Hill, confronting Averill. The remainder of the Confederate line was as before, namely, Fitz Lee, Wharton, Gordon, Rhodes, Ramseur and Lomax, the latter partly opposite the Union left, and partly at the junction of the Millwood and Valley pikes, the former of which Wilson held. The effort to retain this line was fruitless. "The enemy's cavalry," says Early, "again charged around my left flank, and the men began to give way again." As day ended, Early's forces broke through Winchester in complete retreat. "I never saw our troops in such confusion before," wrote a wounded and captured Confederate officer on his diary. "Night found Sheridan's hosts in full and exultant possession of much abused, beloved Winchester. The hotel hospital was full of desperately wounded and dying Confederates. The entire building was shrouded in darkness during the dreadful night, and sleep was impossible, as the groans, sighs, shrieks, prayers and oaths of the wretched sufferers, combined with my own severe pain, banished all thought of rest. Our scat-

tered troops, closely followed by the large army of pursuers, retreated rapidly and in disorder through the city. It was a sad, humiliating sight."

The sixth corps on the left, moved over to the pike south of Winchester, but as it had been a hard and long day of marching and fighting, there was no attempt at infantry pursuit, and probably nothing would have been gained by pushing these tired troops after the flying enemy. The cavalry only followed him up the pike to Kernstown, where Ramseur, by maintaining his organization, effectually covered the retreat, which afterward, under the cover of darkness, was continued toward Strasburg. The Union forces were overjoyed at their success, and their enthusiasm became unbounded when General Sheridan, with Generals Wright, Emery and Crook, rode in front of their lines. The commander-in-chief hastened to write a dispatch, which told the story of the day in the electric phraseology that soon came to be popularly associated with him. "We have just sent them whirling through Winchester, and we are after them to-morrow. This army behaved splendidly." The note of exultation was taken up throughout the North, and the phrase, "whirling through Winchester," was on every tongue. Grant ordered each of his two Richmond armies to fire a salute of one hundred guns, and added in his dispatch to Sheridan: "If practicable, push your success, and make all you can of it;" and President Lincoln, on the day after the battle, at the suggestion and earnest wish of Grant, gave the victor, "little Phil." Sheridan, the well merited appointment of Brigadier-General in the regular army, besides the permanent command of the Middle Military Division, to which his appointment had till then been but temporary. Congratulations from all sides poured in, but none heartier than the following!

"Have just heard of your great victory. God bless you all, officers and men. Strongly inclined to come up and see you.

A. LINCOLN."

Grant followed his first terse dispatch with a longer one :—

“I congratulate you and the army serving under you for the great victory just achieved. It has been most opportune in point of time and effect. It will open again to the Government and to the public the very important line from Baltimore to the Ohio, and also the Chesapeake canal. Better still, it wipes out much of the stain upon our arms by previous disasters in that locality. May your good work continue, is now the prayer of all loyal men.”

The conflict had been a bloody one. The Union loss was from 4,900 to 5,000 men, and of these about 4,300 were killed or wounded, including Russell, and the wounded, Generals Upton, McIntosh, who lost a leg, and Chapman, and Colonels Duval, commanding a division, and Sharp commanding a brigade.

Early's loss was from 3,900 to 4,000. He officially reported the casualties of the infantry and artillery in this battle to be 3,611; and supposing his cavalry loss to be in the same ratio as that of the Union cavalry, that is, about one-eleventh of the whole, we reach the figures already indicated. Of his casualties, nearly 2,000 were prisoners, and many of his wounded, also, were left in the Winchester hospitals, or elsewhere along the valley. Among his killed were Generals Rhodes and Goodwin, and Colonel Patton, a brigade commander. Among his severely wounded were Generals Fitz Lee and York. By promptly recognizing his impending defeat, Early was able to save his trains and stores, and the transportable portion of his sick and wounded. But he left as trophies to Sheridan and his army five pieces of artillery and nine battle-flags, captured on the field.

My friends and comrades, this official narrative of the battle of Winchester conveys but imperfectly to your minds the dreadful picture presented that day. It does not describe in detail the charging and countercharging of armed hosts. The terrible rumble and roar of hundreds of cannon, dealing death and wounds upon that field, can not now be heard. The

groans, the agony of disabled men, stricken down in the prime of early manhood, can not now be realized. Fathers, sons, brothers and lovers here laid down their lives, or were maimed or shattered. Many that day went into the fight, who, by the setting of the September sun, filled soldiers' graves; deeds of heroism were done that day which challenged the admiration of the world. Never did troops perform such prodigies of valor. "From early morn 'till dewy eve" the din and strife, the whirl of bullets, the screaming of shell, and the clanking of sabres were heard, and when the end came the ghastly field was strewn with dead and dying.

Here fell, badly wounded, our gallant division commander, Gen. I. H. Duval, and while crossing a corn-field, and just before reaching the edge of the sanguinary Red Bud, the chivalrous and manly Carter, at the head of Co. D, my old regiment, fell dead at my feet, struck in the forehead with a musket ball. But never faltering, with our eyes fixed on the enemy, who at that time were advancing to the opposite side of the Red Bud, we pushed on amid a shower of musketry that was simply murderous. Emerging on the opposite bank, we ascended the elevation and met them face to face. Then ensued a hand-to-hand conflict. The ranks of Union and Confederate regiments mingled indiscriminately, the colors of both floating in the breeze together, the blue and the gray, man to man. Duval had been carried to the rear with a musket ball in his thigh, but Col. R. B. Hayes, since President of the United States, assumed the command of the division, and by his presence in the battle front encouraged his men to deeds of daring. Cool and vigilant, he sat upon his horse amid that leaden rain, while scores of veterans on either side went down around him. Finally, the tide turned in our favor. Down the hill, hotly pressed by the Union men, went that valiant band of rebels. The day was won. The flag of the old Thirty-fourth never looked so beautiful, nor was borne so proudly, as on that glorious day, when in the thickest of the fight its shadow fell upon its brave defenders.

But when night came, many a comrade failed to answer to roll-call ; their seats at the mess-table and around the camp fire were empty.

But peace is with us now. "Grim visaged war hath smoothed his wrinkled front," and to-day the busy hum of industry has taken the place of the clangor of arms and the strife of contending battalions.

Thank God ! white-winged peace has thrown her mantel around our beloved land, and to-day not an armed foe to our country and its flag can be found from the gulf to the sea.

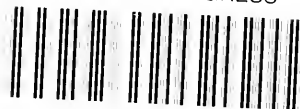
Men who, twenty years ago, met in deadly strife, now clasp hands across the once bloody chasm, and talk of days gone by when the fate of the Nation trembled in the balance.

Northerner and Southerner speak together of the times that tried men's souls, and a common love of country inspires both, while they repeat in unison the touching lines of the poet :

"No more shall the war-cry sever,
Or the winding rivers be red;
They banish our anger forever
When they laurel the graves of our dead;
Under the sod and the dew,
Waiting the judgment day,
Love and tears for the Blue,
Tears and love for the Gray."



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